

Baking Rothenburg Bread “Old World Quality Now”

c 2003 by Gregory Causey

Good afternoon. I'm very pleased to be here today. When I was invited to speak to such an august group such as the American Society of Military Comptrollers I was honored and excited. I told my friend at the local Gasthaus “Hey, I'm gonna speak to that ASMC group and I got this great joke about accountants.”

He said “my friend, do you see the big man at the end of the bar? He is an accountant. And that group of rough looking men at the table over there, they're accountants too.”

“Hey said, “don't worry, I'm gonna tell the joke r-e-a-l slow

Anyway, I'm glad to be here today. Those of you that may have seen my Godfather Management or Rubber Chicken Voodoo Management workshops may have noticed a theme in the presentations. You see, I don't think that this quality, leadership and management stuff is all that complicated, or all that new. I think that it's really pretty basic and simple stuff that's been around for a while. Sometimes we want to fancy this stuff up with polysyllabic names and computer applications but for the most part, we are dealing with old ideas, tried and true stuff. When your management comes around talking about things like Performance Standards, Strategic Planning, Best Value, Mentorship, Quality, Innovation you might get scared. Don't worry, we've been doing this stuff forever, so relax.

You see, this quality thing it's as old as mankind itself. The first caveman, he made decisions based on quality. This berry tastes bad and makes you sick, but this berry tastes good. That animal over there is hard to hunt and is dangerous, but this one is easy to hunt and kill. Those are quality distinctions. Quality has always been important.

Since we all live and work here in Europe I thought that today I would just give you some of my own observations of things that I seen over here that reinforce this concept for me.

How many of you here have ever been over to that Citadel at Bitch? It isn't very far from here, over by Zweibrücken. Pretty impressive the way it sits over the town like some big rock aircraft carrier. Now, how many of you ever been over to Saarlouis or maybe Luxembourg? If you ever been to any of those places, or two of them, or maybe all three you might have noticed some similarities in the architecture of the defensive works and fortifications. I'm here to tell you that it's no accident. All of those places were built or modified by the great French military engineer Sebastien Le Prestre de Vauban. And Vauban believed that it was important to have a choice of suppliers in order to obtain quality construction. He thought that cheapness of price should not be the sole selection criteria; that in the long run this approach was often more expensive. Now this was in about 1685, yet 300 years later this same belief is item number four of Deming's 14 points, which is “end the practice of doing business based on price.” Low

price should not be the biggest thing, it should be value, we want to give our customers value. It's no different now than it was back then.

Has anyone here ever been to Rothenburg on the Tauber? Yea, sure, lots of us. It is a beautiful jewel of Germany, a place not to be missed. And believe it or not, in all that quaint medieval splendor there are quality lessons for us to learn. It's all around us folks; you just have to be aware of it. Did you see the Rauthaus? On one side of the Rauthaus they have these metal rods mounted. These metal rods were their standards for measurement, so everyone had the same standard for measuring. I imagine that you all have standards in your jobs. See, it's not a new thing.

If you've been to Rothenburg, and other European cities, you might have noticed the hoists on top of the gables of the houses. One of the purposes for this was to lift up and store grain in a safe location, in case the town was besieged. I guess you could call this a form of strategic planning, pre-positioning of critical supply stocks. Do we do the same thing today?

While you're in Rothenburg you have to visit the Kriminal Justice museum. It's very entertaining and educational. It seems that they had a standard for bakers, those industrious souls who baked the bread in the town. The local authorities in Rothenburg had a standard for the weight of loaves of bread. Yes! If a baker sold loaves of bread that were too small or underweight it was considered fraud and he was put in a cage and dunked in a pond. And the number of dunkings depended on the amount of weight shortage. So here we have a job standard and a penalty for non-compliance; again, nothing new. So, if you're a baker back in Rothenburg, in the medieval times, you probably don't want to be getting dunked. So what do you do? You probably make sure that you use the same ingredients and the same amounts for each loaf of bread you're making. And maybe you use the same kind of wood and the same amount to get your oven to the same temperature each time. And you try to bake the bread for the same amount of time. You'd be trying to make your process consistent, predictable, repeatable, so that you get the same high-quality and consistent results, in this case a perfect loaf of bread, each time and that you reduce errors and avoid the penalty for failure and non-conformance. Folks, that's almost the same thing as the Design for Six Sigma quality efforts that major corporations like Motorola, GE, Johnson Controls and other people are doing. Make your process consistent, avoid variation, reduce the opportunities for failure. You think maybe that if Arthur Anderson accountants had been held to similar performance standards and were publicly dunked when they didn't measure up that maybe the company wouldn't be going down the tubes and laying off thousands of people?

I saw something the other day that stressed that one of the goals for an organization was "Innovation." Again, this isn't anything new. People have been innovating since the very beginning. Innovation and risk taking is part of the human experience. Probably one of the bravest men ever, one of the great risk-takers of all time, was Urk. He was a caveman, and 11,000 BC, on a Tuesday, he went down in history as probably one of the greatest risk takers of all time. He was the first man to eat an egg. Yes! He was outside

the cave, talking with his caveman buddies. And he looks over and sees this bird, and he sees this thing fall out of the bird's ass. And he runs over and picks it up and says "hey, I'm gonna eat what's inside!" Yes, the first man to eat an egg, that's risk taking, thinking outside the box. So what about in your job, have you eaten any eggs lately? People are always pushing the envelope, innovating, trying something new. That's how we evolve as a people and a society and a culture. That spirit of exploration and risk taking is what has brought us things like Saran Wrap, Band-Aids, canned soup and Barry Manilow. OK, so maybe not Barry Manilow, but you get my point right?

Most of you heard of Shakespeare, right? The English guy that wrote all that funny sounding stuff? He's been dead for a long time but he's still real popular. He wrote a lot of that stuff that women like to hear, you know. For example, when the Duke of Gloucester, in Richard III, was trying to woo the Lady Anne and he gives her this ring and says:

"Look, how this ring encompasseth thy finger,
Even so thy breast encloseth my poor heart;
Wear both of them, for both of them are thine.
And if thy poor devoted servant may
But beg one favor at thy gracious hand,
Thou dost confirm his happiness forever."

Whoa! That's the kind of stuff that will make women melt. In fact, it looks like some of you are beginning to thaw a little bit right now.

Anyway, it turns out that Shakespeare, he wrote a lot of stuff that applies to management, leadership and quality. For instance, in the play "Much Ado About Nothing" one of the characters says:

"What needs the bridge much broader than the flood?
The fairest grant is the necessity.
Look, what will serve is fit."

Now if you were around in the 60s and 70s, you may have heard one of the definitions of quality being "fitness to serve." So why gold-plate something or over engineer it, or over-specify, when it doesn't contribute to the end product? That's what we call that no-value-added. And if you thought that concept was new, well you was wrong.

If you ever seen the play Macbeth then you've seen a reference to mentorship. The play was first acted in 1606, so you can see that this also isn't a new concept. In the play King Duncan says to Banquo:

"Welcome hither:
I have begun to plant thee, and will labor
To make thee full of growing.....
Let me infold thee,
And hold thee to my heart."

And Banquo replies: "There if I grow, the harvest is your own." Mentorship, developing our people; again, not a new concept.

In the play Richard III, the Earl of Richmond gives us evidence of planning:

"Give me some ink and paper in my tent:
I'll draw the form and model of our battle,
Limit each leader to his several charge,
And part in just proportion our small power."

It's like the old saying: "plan your work and work your plan."

As I have illustrated, none of this is new. I hope you can see by these examples that quality concepts have always been with us and are all around us. We just need to look for them and be aware of them. We've always been doing these things, because it's the right thing to do. Good operating principles stay with us and stand the test of time. Sure, we might change the name, or use computer applications to make them work faster or more complicated, but it always goes back to the basics. So if somebody tells you that "oh quality is dead, we did that in the 70s and it didn't work", then they don't know, they were out to lunch then and they're probably still out to lunch.

So let me sum all this up for you. If you can remember anything from all this it should probably be that:

Quality isn't new and it isn't dead

When you get right down to it, quality isn't complicated.

You should be an egg eater.

And finally ,that Shakespeare stuff is a chick magnet!!